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E.O. 12958: DECL: CONCLUSION OF SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS
TAGS: PREL EFIN XL
SUBJECT: EASTERN CARIBBEAN PLANS FOR SOA (C-AL9-00153)

REF: STATE 20677

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. D. Brent Hardt, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Eastern Caribbean Prime Ministers all plan to lead their delegations to the Summit of the Americas. All seven Eastern Caribbean countries believe that the Summit provides an opportune moment to engage the new U.S. Administration to address what they see as a potentially devastating blow to their offshore financial sectors -- tax haven legislation now working its way through Congress. Many would like to raise the region's decade old hobby horse of criminal deportees and their alleged, but actually quite minimal, impact on crime and violence. A few of the more ardent friends of Cuba may look for an opening to advocate for change in our Cuba policy. At least one MFA PermSec expressed concern over host Trinidad's ability to manage personalities at the Summit, but all the countries in the region expressed a desire to see a successful Summit that moves relationships forward. Delegate information follows at end of cable. End Summary.

GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

¶2. (C) Eastern Caribbean (EC) nations have yet to finalize or coordinate their approach to the upcoming Summit of the Americas. A recent CARICOM heads of government meeting in Belize does not appear to have forged a final CARICOM-wide consensus on issues to raise or the appropriate venue in which to raise them. The countries of the Eastern Caribbean sub-region have also not yet forged a consensus amongst themselves on issues to raise at the Summit. Nevertheless, three refrains have been constant in the region since President Obama's election:

ANXIETY OVER TAX HAVEN LEGISLATION

¶3. (C) First, and of vital interest to most Eastern Caribbean countries, is the issue of pending "Tax Haven" legislation in the U.S. Congress. Many EC countries are low tax jurisdictions, and the offshore sector represents a significant economic driver -- in some cases the second largest contributor to national economies after tourism. At least three foreign ministries indicated to us that they intended to raise this legislation, and their strong opposition to it, at the Summit.

CRIMINAL DEPORTEES: THE OLD STANDARD

¶4. (C) Second, EC countries are once again planning on trotting out their longstanding laments about criminal

deportees, hoping that a new Administration will be more amenable to slowing or halting the deportation of non-citizen criminals from the U.S. to their country of citizenship. Every since changes in U.S. laws in the mid-90s led to increasing numbers of deportees from the U.S., Eastern Caribbean countries have been blaming deportees for crime problems in their countries. They have continued to beat this drum despite the fact that there is no evidence of a link between criminal deportees and crime rates in the EC and despite the widespread use of the practice among the countries themselves. At the end of the day, bringing up the issue gives regional leaders a means to blame outside influences for rising crime instead of taking responsibility for it and addressing the home-grown roots of the problem.

REVISITING CUBA POLICY

15. (C) Third, a few Eastern Caribbean countries may take up the cudgel for a re-examination of our Cuba policy by calling on the Administration to end the embargo against Cuba and normalize relations. St. Vincent's Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves would be the most likely advocate on Cuba's behalf, with Dominica, Antigua, or Barbados' leaders also potential advocates. The sympathy for Cuba is deeply rooted among the leaders, who tend to romanticize the revolution and admire Castro for standing up to the United States. By speaking out on the issue, they may seek to position themselves as having led the call on Cuba's behalf in order to earn domestic political points.

COMMON DESIRE FOR SUCCESSFUL SUMMIT

16. (C) All of the Eastern Caribbean countries have conveyed their desire to see a successful Summit that moves relationships forward. One MFA PermSec noted pointedly that "it matters to us that there are no backwards steps on relations within the Hemisphere as a result of the Summit." Some have expressed concern, however, over whether host nation Trinidad and Tobago has a game plan to deal with those who might want to disrupt the Summit. Moreover, while the EC countries certainly do not intend to provoke conflict, the key issues that they intend to raise or support are among those most likely to spark confrontation. Some of these concerns could be mitigated through separate meetings with CARICOM or Eastern Caribbean countries to discuss Tax Haven legislation, but these small countries will likely follow the lead of larger neighbors if Cuba policy becomes a central issue during the summit.

KEY LEADERS

17. (C) Of the EC Prime Ministers planning to attend, Barbados PM David Thompson would be the most likely to take a leadership position to try to steer the Summit towards a successful conclusion. Thompson is practical and can think strategically, and could be a useful partner in forging consensus within the EC and CARICOM generally on issues raised outside the communique. On the opposite side of the scale is the Mercurial PM from St. Vincent, Ralph Gonsalves. Gonsalves is a talented politician with tremendous charisma, and could also be useful in helping to forge consensus. But he is also a committed populist-socialist who idolizes Castro and has expressed strong ties to Hugo Chavez, making him a wild card. Ultimately, he can probably be counted on to do the right thing, but not before setting off a few fireworks for effect. Dominica's Roosevelt Skerrit is closest to Chavez and most dependent on Petro-Caribe and ALBA assistance, and while he is not likely to be vocal, he would likely be found in Chavez's corner on most issues. St. Lucia's Stephenson King and St. Kitts' Denzil Douglas are most likely among the regional leaders to be supportive of U.S. views, except in Douglas' case on Cuba.

DELEGATE INFORMATION

¶8. (U) Delegation notables, Eastern Caribbean:

-- Antigua and Barbuda: Delegation Head, PM Baldwin Spencer; delegates MINFIN Lovell, Antiguan Ambassador to the U.S. Lovell, Antiguan Embassy POLCOUNS Anne-Mary Lane.

-- Barbados: Delegation Head, PM David Thompson (TBD); delegation not confirmed but likely to include FONMIN Maxine McClean and MFA PermSec Teresa Marshall.

-- Dominica: Delegation Head, PM Roosevelt Skerrit; delegates FONMIN Vince Henderson, MFA PermSec Steve Ferrol.

-- St. Kitts and Nevis: Delegation Head, PM Denzil Douglas; delegates St. Kitts Ambassador to the U.S. Izben Williams, Ambassador to CARICOM Wendell Lawrence.

-- St. Lucia: Delegation Head, PM Stephenson King; delegates FONMIN Rufus Bousquet

-- St. Vincent and the Grenadines: Delegation Head, PM Ralph Gonsalves; delegates Mrs. Gonsalves, FONMIN and Mrs. Louis Straker, Attorney General Judith S. Jones-Morgan, St. Vincent Ambassador to the U.S. La Celia Prince.

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